

15

The Voice of the Rod.

THE VOICE OF THE ROD.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 1865,

IN

The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church,

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

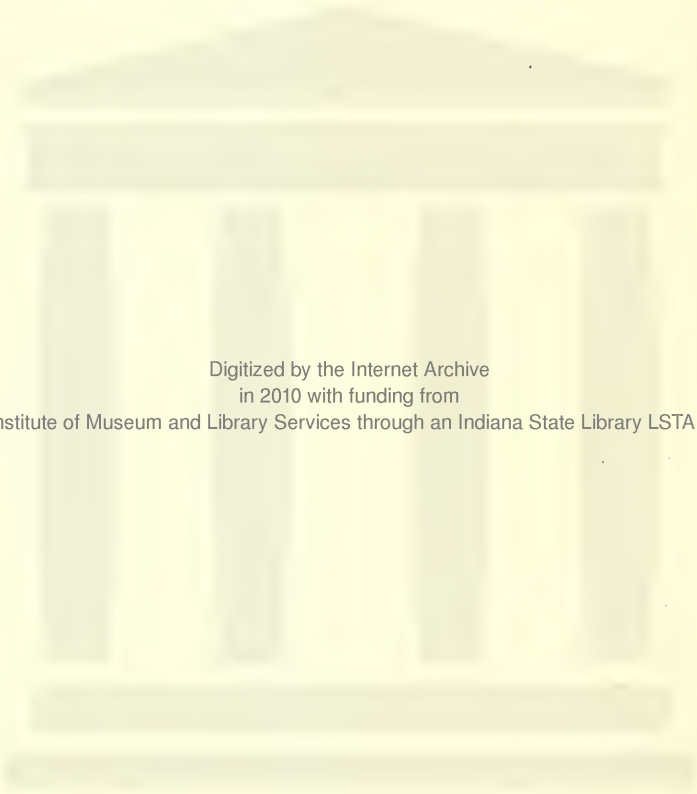
BY

THE REV. P. D. GURLEY, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

WASHINGTON, D. C. :
WILLIAM BALLANTYNE, BOOKSELLER.

1865.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

CORRESPONDENCE.

WASHINGTON CITY, *June 1, 1865.*

Rev. P. D. Gurley, D. D.:

REV. AND DEAR SIR: At a meeting of the congregation to which you minister, it was, on the motion of Brig. Gen. Eaton, seconded by Maj. Gen. Casey, unanimously

Resolved, That the officers of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church be directed to request for publication a copy of the able and singularly appropriate sermon delivered by our pastor, the Rev. P. D. Gurley, D. D., on this the day appointed by the President of the United States as one of "humiliation and prayer."

The undersigned, officers of the New York Avenue Church, of Washington, saddened by the event—the assassination of our honored Chief Magistrate, the late President Lincoln—which has made ours a nation of mourners, and cordially endorsing the suggestive teachings which you, as our under shepherd, called us in that connection this day to consider, hasten to execute the expressed wish of your people, whose representatives we are.

Hoping that you will, at an early day, place a copy of your discourse at our disposal, that the important truths it contains may be more widely disseminated, we are, very sincerely, your brethren,

JAMES P. TUSTIN,
J. McKENNEY,
JNO. M. McCALLA,
F. A. TSCHIFFELEY,
J. V. A. SHIELDS,
JOS. A. DEEBLE,
WM. L. WALLER,
CHARLES STOTT,

Elders.

JAS. B. MUNRO,
GEO. J. MUSSER,
CAREY GWYNNE,

Deacons.

WILLIAM McLEAN,
JOSEPH W. NAIRN,
D. McCLELLAND,

Trustees.

REPLY.

WASHINGTON, June 3, 1865.

To the Elders, Deacons, and Trustees of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church:

DEAR BRETHREN: Your kind note, requesting for publication a copy of the sermon preached by me on Thursday last, is before me. I yield to your judgment, and to the judgment of the congregation you represent, touching the propriety of giving the discourse to the public in a printed form, and send you a copy herewith, according to your request. May the blessing of God attend it, is my sincere and earnest prayer. What thrilling and momentous events we have recently been called to contemplate! What a sore and sudden bereavement we have recently been called to bear! God speaks to us as He never spoke before. Let us study the lessons He is teaching us, study them prayerfully, and lay them to our hearts.

Truly your friend and pastor,

P. D. GURLEY.

SERMON.

"Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."—MICAH, vi, 9.

God is a father. He stands in that relationship to us. When we approach Him as suppliants, He permits us to say "Our *Father* who art in heaven." He performs towards us and for us the *part* of a father—and oh, how wisely and well does He perform it! He gives us food and raiment, shelter and protection, counsel and guidance, education and discipline, comfort and blessing. Nay, more: He gives us *the rod of correction* when we go astray; gives it for our good, that He may remind us of our sins, reclaim us from our wanderings, and incline us to walk more carefully and steadily in the way of his commandments, which is the way of life and peace. The rod of correction and chastening—our heavenly Father holds it in his hand, and He uses it betimes for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. His ancient people, in the midst of their waywardness and wanderings, felt that rod from time to time—felt it often and severely—and as they suffered beneath its heavy inflictions, this mandate came to them from heaven: "*Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.*" We, the people of this land, have felt that same rod; we, too, have felt it often and severely; we have felt it recently—how keenly we have felt it!—we feel it to-day; and as *we* bow, and weep, and suffer beneath its heavy inflictions—perhaps, I should say, beneath that latest and heaviest infliction of all, the death of our lamented Chief Magistrate—the mandate which comes to us from heaven is this: "*Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.*" The rod, then, is not a thing of chance. It is an appointment—an appointment of God. It is applied in his own time, which is the best time, and in his own way, which is the best way. The great national affliction which brings us here to-day did not come forth of the dust; the trouble that so

suddenly turned our gladness into mourning did not spring out of the ground. It was the ordering of Him whose throne is in the heavens, and whose kingdom ruleth over all. He appointed the rod that smote us so unexpectedly. He struck the blow that has clothed the nation in sackcloth. And we may depend upon it that our views are not right to-day, and our feelings are not right, unless we are prepared to look through and beyond all the second causes that operated in the case to the great First Cause, and to say from our very hearts, "It is the Lord. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The text, moreover, suggests that the rod of *correction* is also a rod of *instruction*. It has a voice. It speaks. It teaches. It proclaims timely lessons of wisdom and of warning, which we are to consider and lay to our hearts. "*Hear ye the rod,*" says the Spirit of inspiration. Hear what it says. It is the *voice*, as well as the *hand*, of God. While it smites it instructs. While it bereaves it enriches. While it terrifies it also testifies. And they that are wise will study its testimony, and understand it, and derive such a blessing from it as will induce them to say in the end, "It is good for us that we have been afflicted."

It is my simple purpose to-day to set before you, and urge you to remember and improve, some of the lessons of wisdom and warning which the chastening hand of God is now teaching us. "*Hear ye the rod.*" And what is its language, its teaching, its clear and impressive testimony? I answer—

1. The rod of chastening which we feel to-day teaches us to *acknowledge and adore the sovereignty of God*. He has smitten us in a way and in such an hour as we thought not. Our late President, by his administrative career of blended wisdom and energy, promptitude and patience, justice and mercy, had greatly endeared himself to all the loyal people in the land. We had learned to admire, and love, and trust him. During four stormy and perilous years he had guided the ship of state so cautiously and well that we desired to continue him at the helm for four additional years; and we felt that, having such a pilot, we should, with the blessing of God, outlive the tempest and anchor at last in tranquil waters, where the winds and waves of rebellion should disturb and imperil us no more. Our eyes and hearts were

turned to him. His integrity commanded our confidence, and his wise and timely utterances stimulated our patriotism and inspired our souls with hope. "May he live to the end of his term—live till the wounds of the nation are healed," was the silent prayer of our hearts. But God's ways are not as our ways, and His thoughts are not as our thoughts. In His wise and mysterious providence He permitted a conspiracy to be formed against the life of the nation's head, and He permitted the purpose of the conspirators to be executed. The plan was carefully laid, the time appointed, the place chosen, the means of escape prepared, and, when all things were ready, the fatal shot was fired, and he whom the nation delighted to trust and to honor, bowed his head, languished in utter unconsciousness for a few brief hours, and then he was a corpse. Never did the wires of the magnetic telegraph convey so sad a message to the people of the land as was conveyed on that memorable morning. They heard it, and were filled with horror; they considered it, and wept in silence. They were so troubled that they could not speak. They met one another upon the street, clasped hands, burst into tears, separated, and returned to their homes to weep there. "The victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people;" and as they looked through their tears, with trembling hearts, to heaven, they could only say, "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." And surely this must be our feeling and our language to-day. As we review the events of that terrible Friday night, that night of horrors, and then look around us and see the nation clothed in mourning, and then remember that long funeral procession that bore the remains of our murdered Chief to Springfield, and then feel that our bereavement is a reality and not a dream, that he is verily gone, and we shall see his face no more, it must needs be that we acknowledge and adore the sovereignty of God, and that we understand as we never understood before the force of such Scriptural records as these: "Our God is in the heavens; He hath done whatsoever He pleased." "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" "How great are His signs! and how mighty are His

wonders!" "Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." It is said that when the multitudes were looking upon the remains of our departed President in Philadelphia, a venerable and intelligent colored woman came up, and having gazed for a moment upon the faded form as it lay silent and lifeless in its coffin, she clasped her hands in agony, while her tears were flowing fast, and exclaimed with a loud voice, "O, Abraham Lincoln! Are you dead? Are you dead?" You may imagine, if you can, but I cannot undertake to describe the effect of this exclamation upon all who heard it. Many a time within the last few weeks have we all felt as she felt, and our hearts, if not our lips, have said, "O, Abraham Lincoln! Are you dead? Are you dead?" Yes, he is dead; and his death has plunged us into the lowest depths of sorrow. But our affliction is from God. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" What saith the High and Lofty One in these Lively Oracles? "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I, the Lord, do all these things." And again He says: "Hear the rod, and *who hath appointed it.*" In several different places, as we pursued that sad and never-to-be-forgotten journey to Springfield, did I see this touching and appropriate inscription: "Be still, and know that I am God"—showing that under the pressure of sorrow the people were recognizing and adoring the Divine sovereignty. Let us do the same to-day. While we weep, let us bow and worship, and say to Him who has smitten us, "We know, O God, that Thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted us." Has the rod a voice? Does it speak? Does it teach while it smites? Sure am I that a part, and an important part, of what it teaches us is this: "Be still, and know that I am God."

2. The rod of chastening which we feel to-day *teaches us the duty of depending upon God with an exclusive and an abiding confidence.* Perhaps we were leaning too much upon our wise and patriotic President. Perhaps our devotion to him and our confidence in him were rendering us too unmindful of that High and Holy and Mighty One in whom are all our springs, and without whom we can do nothing. In the flush and joy of victory, perhaps we forgot to acknowledge Him as we ought, to praise Him

as we ought, and to ask Him to be with us and help us to the end. We rejoiced, but not with that trembling which became us in view of our weakness, our wanderings, and our sins. We needed something to arrest, and solemnize, and humble us—something to lead us to feel as we had never felt before, and to acknowledge as we had never acknowledged before, that the favor of God, even after the battle had been fought and the victory won, was our only security. And what we needed we received. The rod of chastening fell upon us suddenly, fearfully—and behold, the man to whom we had extended so much of our confidence, and upon whom we had centered such large and lively hopes, was no more. It was a gloomy, an unlooked-for, a momentous, a perilous crisis. And to whom could we go but unto God? How helpless we felt! how utterly in the hands and at the disposal of an overruling Providence! What a realizing sense we had in that hour of our perils and our dependence! With humility, as well as grief, we bowed before the Majesty of heaven, and every one of us said, with deeper, stronger emotions than we had felt before, even in the darkest days of our civil strife,

“ My spirit looks to God alone ;
My rock and refuge is his throne ;
In all my fears, in all my straits,
My soul on his salvation waits.”

So we felt when our trial first came, and, I trust, the solemn services and remembrances of this day will but deepen and intensify the feeling of utter dependence upon God in every one of our hearts. Let us revert a moment to the history of the past. When the war was opening, and our chosen leader was entering upon his grave and responsible duties, he recognized his dependence upon God and solicited an interest in our prayers. And what did we do? We bore him earnestly and often before the throne of mercy upon the arms of faith and love. All the loyal and praying people in the land sent up their petitions for him day and night with earnestness and tears. Never before was any President so remembered and prayed for in the closet, the sanctuary, and around the family altar; and never before was any President so sustained, and guided, and made a blessing to his country, to liberty, to the world. He lived till the war was over and the

victory gained, and then his work was done. And now another stands in his place, to gather and preserve the legitimate fruits of victory, to repair abounding desolations, and re-establish our lately imperilled nationality upon a sure and enduring foundation—a foundation of liberty and righteousness, of unity and peace. And what *can* we, what *should* we do for him? Just what we did for his distinguished predecessor. Acknowledge his dependence and the nation's dependence upon God, and bear him up to God day and night by faith and prayer, that an arm more than human may sustain him, and a wisdom more than human may be his guide. Yes, we must begin again now, just as we began four years ago, by looking earnestly and prayerfully to God, and we must continue now, just as we continued through the long and bloody strife, looking earnestly and prayerfully to God, and we must plead now for the new President just as we pleaded for the late President, that God will furnish him for his mission, and spare him till it be accomplished. And, if I mistake not, this is a part of the teaching, the message, which comes to us to-day as we weep in the furnace of trial. "*Hear ye the rod,*" my brethren. It speaks—speaks to the nation—speaks to us. And what is its testimony? It says, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" It says, "Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." It says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." It says, "Continue in prayer." It says, "Still acknowledge your dependence upon God, and still commit the nation, with its rulers, and people, and all its precious interests, unto Him, and He will finish the work of deliverance, and ordain peace, and continue to do great things for you whereof you shall be glad." It is even so. Unless we have studied the matter to no purpose, the rod of chastening which we feel to-day is teaching us renewedly the duty of depending upon God and waiting before Him as suppliants with an exclusive and an abiding confidence.

3. Again, the rod of chastening which we feel to-day suggests to us that *when a great mission is to be accomplished for God and humanity, it is sometimes necessary that he who accomplishes it should also seal it with his blood.* History is full of illustrations

of this thought. We refer you to two or three: Abel had a mission to accomplish—a momentous mission. It was to exhibit, in the infancy of the world and to all the subsequent ages, the great doctrine of justification by faith in the blood of atonement—the great truth that there is no acceptance for sinners with God unless they come to Him in the name and through the merits of Him who is the divinely appointed sacrifice for sin, wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities. He understood this principle; he embraced it; he adhered to it in the face of peril and persecution. But this was not enough. It was necessary that he should seal it with his blood. He did so seal it; and that sealing gave it an impress of power beyond the ability of man to estimate. John the Baptist had a mission—a momentous mission. It was to prepare the way of the Lord, to tell the Jewish people their sins, exhort them to repentance, baptize them with water as a symbol of needed spiritual purification, and proclaim in their hearing, “He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” He performed his duty, performed it boldly, earnestly, and well. But that was not enough. It was necessary that he should seal his mission with his blood. He did so seal it; and that sealing gave it an influence over the minds and hearts of men which it could have derived from no other source. Stephen had a mission—a momentous mission. It was to testify for Christ in Jerusalem, and before the Jewish Sanhedrim. It was to defend the inauguration of the new, the Christian dispensation, and show that the teachings of the Apostles respecting it were in exact and beautiful harmony with all the teachings of God, and all his dealings with the Church from the beginning. He bore his testimony boldly, faithfully. But that was not enough. It was necessary that he should seal it with his blood. He did so seal it. And who shall tell us how much that sealing had to do with the subsequent spread and triumph of the gospel? All the Apostles had a mission—a glorious mission of power, and love, and blessing to the world. They told the story of the cross; they proclaimed the character and urged the claims of the Crucified in the hearing of Jews and Gentiles; they besought

men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God; they were fearless and faithful in all their ministry, and they shunned not to declare unto sinners "all the counsel of God." But that was not enough. They, too, must seal their mission with their blood. With perhaps a single exception they did so seal it. And who shall tell us how much that sealing had to do with the renowned and subsequent victories of Christianity in every part of the Roman Empire? All the martyrs of the early Church had a mission—a blessed mission. They also were witnesses for Christ. They loved Him, they honored Him, they clung to Him, and they could not deny Him. But that was not enough. They must seal their testimony with their blood. They did so seal it. And the effects of that sealing were so beneficent and abounding that it soon became a proverb in Zion, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." It was precious seed; God blessed the springing thereof, and it yielded a long succession of harvests to the praise of the glory of His grace. In all these instances the sealing of blood completed the antecedent mission of truth and love, sanctified it, crowned it with glory, and made it precious, memorable, and powerful forever. Is not the same thing true, manifestly true, in the case of our murdered President? He, too, had a mission—a momentous mission; a mission for liberty, for humanity, for his country, and his God. God raised him up for it, prepared him for it, gave him wisdom and energy, and firmness and patience to accomplish it—permitted him to see the end of the war, the end of slavery, and the dawning glories of a brighter and a better day. But that was not enough. He, too, must seal his mission with his blood. He did so seal it. And that sealing has sanctified it, crowned it with glory, and made it precious, memorable, and powerful forever. That sealing attaches sanctity now to all that he ever said and did for the cause of truth and justice, of law and order, of liberty and good government. It imparts a new power to his example and life, new interest to his speeches and proclamations, a new value to every principle he announced and defended; and it inspires every patriotic heart in the land with a new and a firmer resolve that the Republic shall live, and that its bondsmen shall be free. Nay, more: that sealing has attracted the gaze and moved the

heart of the world. Surrounding nations have seen it, and while their sympathies are aroused for a weeping people so suddenly bereft of their wise and honored head, they will not forget the cause for which he died. They will now consider the claims of that cause as they never considered them before, and judge between it and its enemies as they never judged before, and rejoice with us, that though our President is dead, liberty survives, and our national life is secure. Many eyes in distant lands are turned in tearful sympathy to-day towards that new-made grave in Springfield. They will be turned there for years and years to come; and we may well say, as we gather in imagination around that loved and lonely tomb,

"This consecrated spot shall be
To Freedom ever dear;
And Freedom's sons of every race
Shall weep and worship here."

Many hearts in distant lands are with us to-day as we mourn our martyred Chief, and they unite with us in the petition,

"Grant that the cause for which he died
May live forevermore."

And if it be true, my hearers, that the blood of our assassinated President is the seed of liberty and truth, and that our loss is gain to the cause he loved and served so well—then, while we mourn to-day, we should not murmur, and, while we weep, we should not complain. "*Hear ye the rod;*" and remember one of its lessons is, that *when a great mission is to be accomplished for God and humanity, it is sometimes necessary, in order to secure the largest and best results therefrom, that he who accomplishes it should also seal it with his blood.*

4. Again, the chastening rod which we feel to-day suggests to us *what is the real tendency, and what are the diabolical capabilities and achievements of that combined spirit of treason and slavery with which we have been contending for the last four years.* We have seen it strike at the life of the nation with a malicious and a persistent vigor that filled us with wonder. We have seen it madly bent upon the overthrow, at any and every cost, of the mildest and best government the world ever saw. We have seen it, for this very purpose, inaugurating and cruelly protracting a

war that has filled the land with mourning. We have seen it chanting the praises of slavery and declaring it to be the great mission of the South to keep four millions of human beings, with their descendants, in bondage. We have seen it cursing and denouncing and laboring to destroy a Union of States, which, under God, has placed us in the foremost rank of free and prosperous nations. We have seen it commissioning incendiaries to burn our largest cities in the night. We have seen it leaving our unfortunate and suffering prisoners without food and shelter till they died, or sending them back to us in such a condition, physical and mental, that it were a relief to see them die. And now at the last we have seen it cap the climax of all its crimes and atrocities by assassinating the man whose lips and life were vocal with the utterance, "With malice towards none, with charity for all." It is enough. The blindest can see now, and all the world can see, that the spirit with which we have been contending is the very spirit of darkness and of the pit of darkness. It began with perjury and theft; it culminated in murder; and now, a spectacle and a horror to the world, its true character revealed, and its infernal origin and destination demonstrated, nothing remains for it but a few expiring struggles and a death that will fill both earth and heaven with joy. Thanks be to God who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Thanks be to God that the blow which prostrated the President was the last desperate effort of a defeated fiend, who, having failed to kill the nation, could only kill the nation's head, and thereby render his own destruction the more sure and speedy. "Hear ye the rod." It unmasks the enemy with which we have been contending, reveals the fearfulness of the perils we have escaped, the value of the victory we have won, and bids us look up to-day and say to the God of our salvation with hearts deeply and tenderly thankful, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake."

5. Finally, the rod of chastening which we feel to-day suggests a lesson *touching the character and influence of the theatre*, which we should note and remember. It will always be a matter of deep regret to thousands that our lamented President fell in the theatre; that the dastardly assassin found him, shot him there. Multitudes

of his best friends—I mean his *Christian* friends—would have preferred that he should have fallen in almost any other place. Had he been murdered in his bed, or in his office, or on the street, or on the steps of the Capitol, the tidings of his death would not have struck the Christian heart of the country quite so painfully; for the feeling of that heart is that the theatre is one of the last places to which a good man should go, and among the *very* last in which his friends would wish him to die. Little or nothing has been said upon this subject in the pulpit or by the religious press; but it is one of the cases in which silence is more expressive than words, and, therefore, I shall say no more. I ask you, however, to consider this: when a murderous conspiracy has been formed, and the assassination of the President has been resolved upon, and the conspirators are looking for a suitable person to perform the dreadful deed, to strike the fatal blow, or fire the fatal shot, where do they find him? Who is the man they select? To whom is the dark and hellish work committed? *To a man schooled and trained in the theatre.* He is just the agent suited to the occasion, just the bold, and daring, and practiced actor, who can steal behind his victim, skilfully lodge the fatal bullet in his brain, bound quickly and adroitly away, stalk defiantly across the stage, brandish a dagger, shout "*Sic semper tyrannis,*" and mysteriously disappear. Just what we might expect from such a character, trained in such a place, maddened with disloyalty, heated with liquor, and *used to the exciting and tragic scenes of the theatre.* Surely a place where such men are trained and fitted for such atrocious deeds of death is not a proper resort for you, my hearers, or for those you love. For my own part, I have always regarded the theatre as in the main a school of vice and corruption—the illumined and decorated gateway through which thousands are constantly passing into the embrace of gaiety and folly, intemperance and lewdness, infamy and ruin. I have always hated and avoided it, and taught my children to avoid it, on account of its character and influence, its associations and accompaniments, its misleading, corrupting, and demoralizing tendencies; but henceforth it will be more odious to me than ever before. May it be odious to you. I deem this a suitable occasion to lift my voice against it, and to exhort you to number it from this day forth among the polluting, perilous, and pro-

hibited places where you and your children must never be found. And as for yonder building stained with the blood of him for whom the nation mourns to-day, let Aeceldama be written upon its walls, and let it stand for years to come as it now stands, silent, gloomy, forlorn, more like a sepulchre than a place of amusement, saying to all the passers-by, "Here the greatest crime of the age was committed, and committed by one who was addicted to tragedy and had made the stage his home."

And now, having considered some of the lessons which God is teaching us *by the voice of the rod*, let us unite in the prayer that these lessons may be sanctified and made a blessing to us all. May they be sanctified to rulers and people, to all the people, to all our rulers from the highest to the lowest, so that we shall be the better and not the worse for our sudden and sore bereavement. What we need now, and what the whole country needs, is an influence from above—a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. This, more than anything else, will heal alienations, soften down asperities, lead the guilty to repentance, beget in the hearts of all a spirit of kindness and conciliation, of forgiveness and love, and hasten that blessed day when revolted States shall return to their allegiance, and we shall be once more a united and happy people. We have received a baptism of blood, copious, protracted, terrible; O that it may be followed, and that right early, by the precious and purifying baptism of the Holy Spirit. "Come, Holy Spirit, come"—come to every heart and habitation in the land, and do us the good we need. Brethren, join me to-day in the prayer of the Prophet and of Inspiration: "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" "Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants. O satisfy us early with Thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants and Thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it." Amen and Amen.

